

one of our Nation's finest, died in the crash.

Aaron Weaver was a husband, a father, a brother, and a son; but he was also a fighter. In Iraq, Aaron was fighting to protect our country's way of life while fighting for his own life as well. You see, Aaron Weaver was a cancer survivor. He was still being treated when his unit was called to duty in Iraq. Aaron had a choice to stay, but he elected to fight for the country that he loved. Aaron was on the way to have his blood tested for cancer when the Black Hawk he was riding in was shot down, killing all on board.

We know well our freedom could not have been won nor our liberty maintained without those willing to make this ultimate sacrifice. But I know these are weak words to the grieving family left behind. I pray the Lord will maintain their memory of Aaron and assuage their pain. Aaron survived the battles in Mogadishu, he fought cancer, and was engaged in a great and noble cause in Iraq. Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring a true American hero.

Last Saturday, I attended services for Aaron. He lived in Citrus County, and his father still resides there. The whole family was there. They are a military family, a very, very devoted military family, and a very close family who all grieved the loss of Aaron. I would like to paraphrase his widow's comments. His widow is Nancy Weaver, and she made a comment that Aaron's life, the loss of his life, will not be in vain if children in America can live safely; if his children and every other child in America can live without fear of another attack like 9-11.

Mr. Speaker, Aaron Weaver truly was a modern American hero, and we are grateful for his service and the service of all the men and women who are serving our country.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MEEK of Florida addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CALIFORNIA AND THE ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, tonight when President Bush begins to talk about the state of the Union, I hope that he includes remarks that will address the plight of the people that I represent in my district.

On the economy, the President will probably talk about how our country is coming out of a recession, and in some parts of my district the recession has been there for 3 years. In fact, in at least two areas I represent, in East Los Angeles, the unemployment rate is still above 9 percent. In the city of

South El Monte, neighboring the community I live by, which is about 70 percent Latino, I would say the recession has not gone home. It is there. It is 9 percent.

Over 60,000 Californians in my State have exhausted their Federal unemployment benefits and another 340,000 Californians will lose those benefits in the next 4 months alone. Long-term unemployment is at a 20-year high. President Bush claimed that the \$330 billion so-called jobs through tax cuts would help create 5.5 million new jobs by the end of 2004 or 306,000 a month. The thousand jobs added to the economy in December left the Nation 305,000 short of the Bush job promise in that month alone.

Grocery workers in the State of California, 70,000, are right now on strike. They have no employment and no unemployment insurance, these families that we are talking about, not just people that have somehow disregarded their employment status. Many are women with children who are faced with having to go to food lines and go seeking other types of assistance because our State will not even provide them with unemployment insurance. The grocery strike is a part of a larger debate on health care and wages going on in this country; and these workers, and workers around the country, are fighting for fair and livable wages and for health care benefits that will allow them to ensure health care for their families.

On homeland security, at a time when we are susceptible to being attacked now more than ever, we are seeing more cutbacks in our local government enforcement of law enforcement and firefighters. In my district, people are telling me that they no longer have the support to continue to work overtime. And every time that red alert or orange alert goes on, there is a lack of money, of sufficient funds to provide for the kind of coverage that we all believe that we should have.

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In health care, the President's Medicaid block grant proposal jeopardizes the future of the Medicaid program for millions and millions of low-income families and children. At a time when States like California are facing growing budget deficits, Medicaid reform proposals must focus on strengthening health care coverage and the safety net for our Nation's most vulnerable. Block granting Medicaid will force States to ration care by limiting the number of people who can enroll in those programs. It will reduce services and will increase the amount of money that low-income people must pay. Medicaid provides health coverage to one in six Americans, more than one-fifth of the Nation's children and their future must be the responsibility of this government.

With respect to racial and ethnic minority groups in the U.S., they continue to suffer poor health care. Their

outcomes are not good. In fact, the risk for type II diabetes among Latinos is almost twice that for non-Latinos. Eliminating these disparities requires a commitment on the part of the Federal Government to ensure that the needs of minority communities are being heard.

On education, how can schools, teachers and students be expected to meet the high standards of the No Child Left Behind Act when the President refuses to fully fund this initiative? At a time when in my home State of California, the education budget is threatened by a cut of \$2 billion, it is unfair to place this additional burden upon our children and our parents in California.

On the environment, Republicans continue to protect the wealthy corporate interests and bend over backwards to manipulate our environmental regulations to profit their allies. The health of our children and families is threatened. We should not sacrifice clean air, clean water, our most precious natural resources, and, most importantly, the health of our families.

With respect to Iraq and our veterans, the capture of Saddam Hussein was a great victory for our troops. However, we have a lot more to do. The war is not over. Our real enemy has not been captured. For example, over 500 soldiers have been killed in Iraq, with 372 of them since the President declared the end of major combat in Iraq. At this time of conflict we are reminded every day that our soldiers' sacrifices should not be taken in vain. Although we have lost a significant number of soldiers, a lot more, approximately 2,900, have been wounded in combat or disabled. Furthermore, these numbers mask the true impact of our wounded and fallen soldiers.

We need to do more. President Bush must encourage the Republican Party to keep their promise to our troops and to our country.

HEARTLAND FIRES ARE BURNING ON EVE OF PRESIDENT'S VISIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, this evening the President will address this Congress and America. Tomorrow morning he will travel to northwest Ohio, the region in which I reside and represent. Ohio's snow-covered fields and towns this time of year give a placid impression, but they mask the fire that is burning inside the homes that dot the real Ohio that the President will not visit. It really is too bad. Air Force One will pass over most of us in northern Ohio on Wednesday morning, tomorrow.

Sealed off from the general public in a tight security bubble, the President will land at an airfield and travel by